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SUBJECT: BRITISH APOLOGIES AND PROMISES MAKE NO IMPACT ON BASRAH
PROVINCIAL COUNCIL BOYCOTT

REF: (A) BASRAH 0010 (B) BASRAH 0012 (C) BASRAH 0013 (D) BASRAH 0014 (E) BASRAH 0015

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Basrah
Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: On February 07, the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC), attended a meeting of Basrah Provincial Council (PC) members, the UK 7th Armored Brigade Commander and the British Consul General. The meeting was organized by the British at the Basrah Palace Compound to provide information to the PC members so that they would consider ending the boycott (see refs.) The British did provide some evidence on the detainees and promised to release them into the Iraqi judicial system as soon as possible. The PC members though were adamant that the detainees be released immediately and that more detailed evidence is presented of their crimes. The meeting ended with no resolution of the current boycott. However, after the meeting, the British discussed ways to put pressure on the PC to lift the boycott and expressed hope for a resolution in the following week. End Summary.

12. (S/NF) The meeting included the Chairman of the Provincial Council, Mohamed H. H. Al Obadi, the Deputy Provincial Council (DPC) Chairman Nusaeef Jasim Ali and the Head of the Security Supervisory Committee of the Provincial Council, Mr. Hakim al Meahee. The 7th Armored Brigade Commander, Brigadier General (BG) Patrick Marriot and the British Consul General (CG) James Tansley represented the British side. The DRC had been asked to attend by both the Provincial Council members and the British as a mediator and an observer. The Basrah Governor, Mohammed Al Waili, was also invited but declined to attend. However, BG Marriott spoke to the Governor on the phone prior to the meeting to brief him. According to BG Marriott, the Governor shared his desire to have the situation resolved and the boycott ended immediately.

13. (S/NF) BG Marriott started the meeting with a slide presentation on the UK plans for reforming the Iraqi police in Basrah. Mr. Hakim pointed out that the plans showed agreement by the Ministry of Interior, but no consultation with the Basrah Provincial Council. BG Marriott acknowledged this and regretted that the Provincial Council was not included in the initial plans. BG Marriott then presented evidence on why the two Iraqi Police officers were arrested by the British military. The crimes included acceptance of bribes and attacks on Coalition Forces. However, Chairman Obadi stated that the evidence was not specific enough and did not include any details. CG Tansley stressed the legal basis for the arrests and pointed out that

the current security situation called for the British military to take action. Mr Hakim responded that the Provincial Council was ignored and not consulted prior to the arrests. Chairman Obadi added that the manner, in which the arrests were done, proved unacceptable to the tribes. He stated that the British did not understand the culture in which they were operating.

14. (S/NF) With regards to this UK cultural misunderstanding, the DRC has heard the same accusation from several tribal sheiks. Apparently, the British military arrested the two individuals in their houses at night and surprised unveiled women in those houses. For the tribal members, this was an insult that could only be remedied by the immediate release of the detainees. In the meeting, BG Marriott apologized for the manner in which the individuals were arrested, but stressed that it was done to minimize casualties that may have resulted if they had tried to take the individuals during the day with their armed 30 bodyguards. BG Marriott also pointed out that the boycott enjoyed very little support among the local population as shown in the demonstration of only 300 people last week. Chairman Obadi stated he could call on all one million people to demonstrate tomorrow if that would convince the British to release the detainees.

15. (S/NF) BG Marriott stressed that the Iraqi Police (IP) were to begin a training program on Feb 10 for which around USD 300,000 had been allotted. He said that the boycott would prevent the IP from starting the program on the designated date and that the money would therefore be shifted elsewhere. The DRC urged the Provincial Council members to allow the training to start on time, however, Chairman Obadi reiterated that the boycott would not be lifted until the detainees were released. DPC Nussaif added that the British military also held 41 other detainees with little or no evidence and these also had not been released to the Iraqi judicial system.

16. (S/NF) The meeting, which lasted almost three hours, did little to end the boycott. As a result, after the meeting BG Marriott and CG Tansley discussed ways to apply pressure on the

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Provincial Council to lift the boycott. It was decided that they would announce at a press conference that because of the boycott, the UK was shifting all reconstruction and program money to Maysan Province. The goal would be to show the local Basrah population how their elected officials are losing sorely needed cash to a neighboring province. However, BG Marriott mentioned that this might not have any effect since he believed that the Chair of the Anti-Corruption Committee of the Basrah Provincial Council, Khazl Jaloob Falih Abu Salam, may be the real driving force behind the boycott. Abu Salam (Fadillah Party) has a history of anti-British rhetoric and sentiment.

17. (S/NF) Comment: The marathon meeting produced little in terms of finding a resolution to the current boycott. However, it was successful in highlighting the stubborn position of the Provincial Council. Despite several apologies and a show of evidence from BG Marriott plus a promise of detainee release in the near future from CG Tansley, the PC members kept repeating the same demands. There may be another underlying reason for the PC stubbornness, which may be linked to the fear they have of the tribal shieks and/or PC member Abu Salam. In fact, BG Marriott mentioned to the DRC that on the night of February 7, the Governor told him he was afraid he was going to be attacked by the tribes and was going to call on the Iraqi Army for protection. As it turned out, his fear never materialized and the Iraqi Army was never mustered. End Summary.

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